K9 and the MISSING PLANET

DAVID MARTIN

FROM: Gallifrey Databank
TO: Gallifrey High Command

CLASSIFICATION: Most Secret

SUBJECT: K9
HISTORY: Robot dog designed and first constructed by a certain Professor Marius (type: Earth, male) in year 5000 A.D. Built as a mobile computer unit and pet replacement. Later modified by Time Lord Theta Sigma (also known as 'The Doctor') to improve performance.

POTENTIAL USE: Now capable of independent missions in situations classed as too dangerous for Time Lord intervention.

EQUIPMENT: Sophisticated polysensory tracking systems. Self-energising drive and decision-making capability. Multi-phase photon-blaster infinitely variable from 'immobilisation' to 'dematerialisation'.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: Spacecraft K-NEL. Ion rocket motors (3) only. No time-travel facility. Operated as extension of K9's central computer. No armaments. Shape, smooth triangular block. Colour, white. Speed: UNDISCLOSED.

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K9

and the MISSING PLANET

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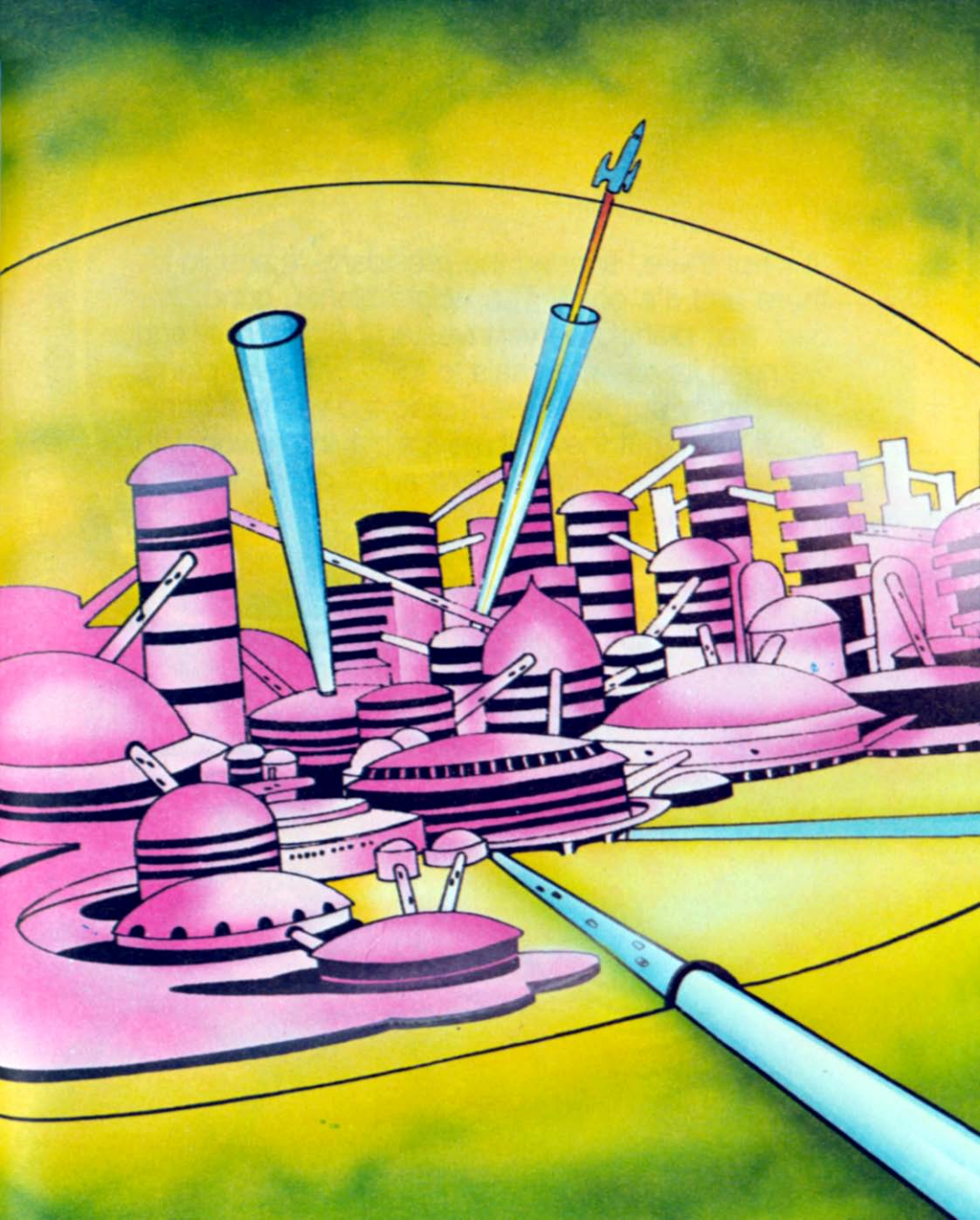
When K9 arrived on Tellus, he was immediately shot through tubes, along conveyors, up escalators, down gravity shafts — and into the office of the president of Tellac Inc.

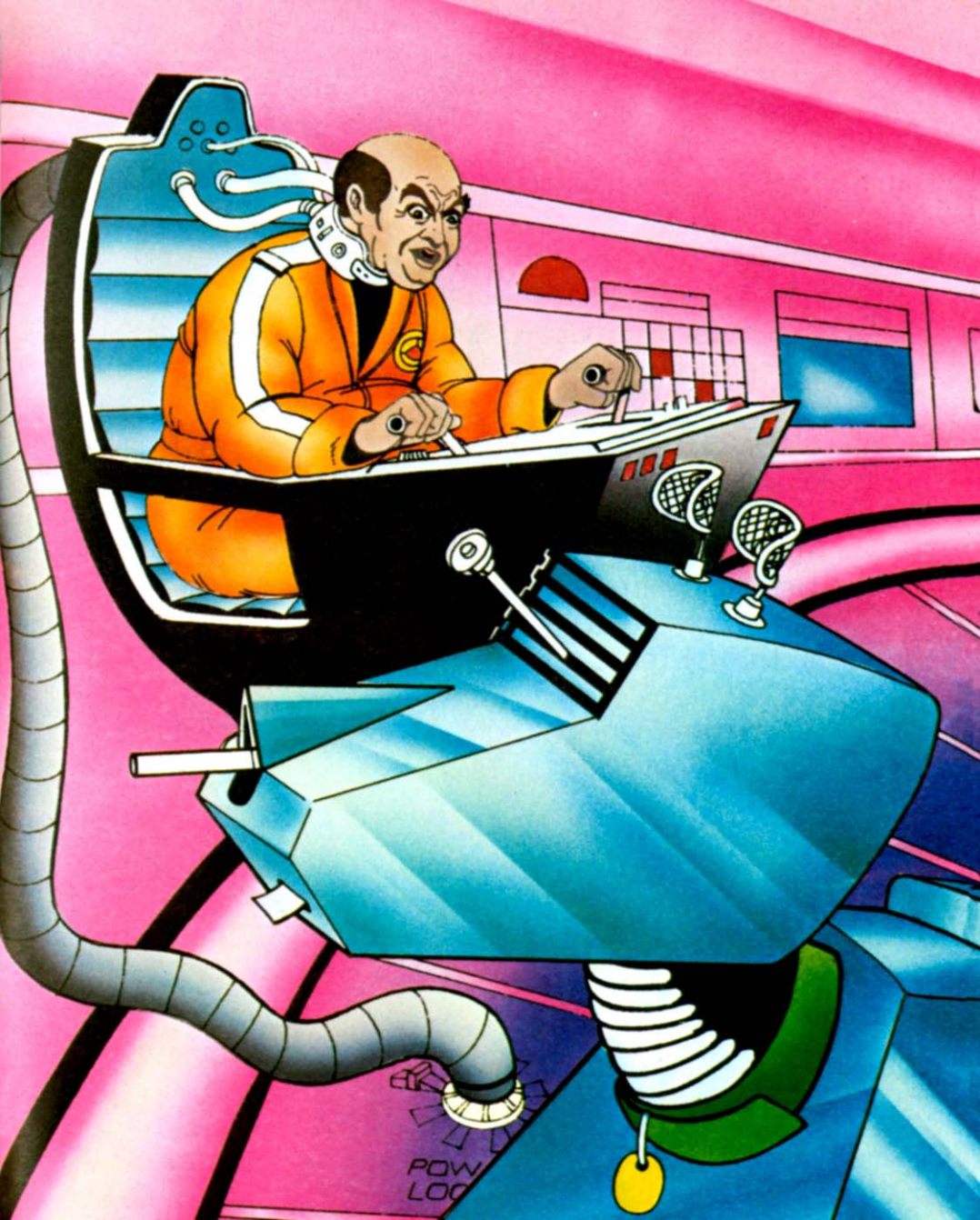
Outside the insane mechanical rush went on — everybody hurrying, nobody walking.

Above the whole complex rose a vast dome. Beyond it, the thick yellow factory smoke filled the air.

There were no trees on Tellus. Even the grass was plastic.



'It's not there,' snarled the president. 'It should be there and it's gone. The whole planet, gone. We own that planet, we've invested billions in it, and we need its raw materials to fuel our power plants and supply our factories. Tellac Inc wants it back. Apart from that they tell me it's playing havoc with navigation . . . Oh, and there are a dozen families missing too. Miners, it says here. You better get it back!'

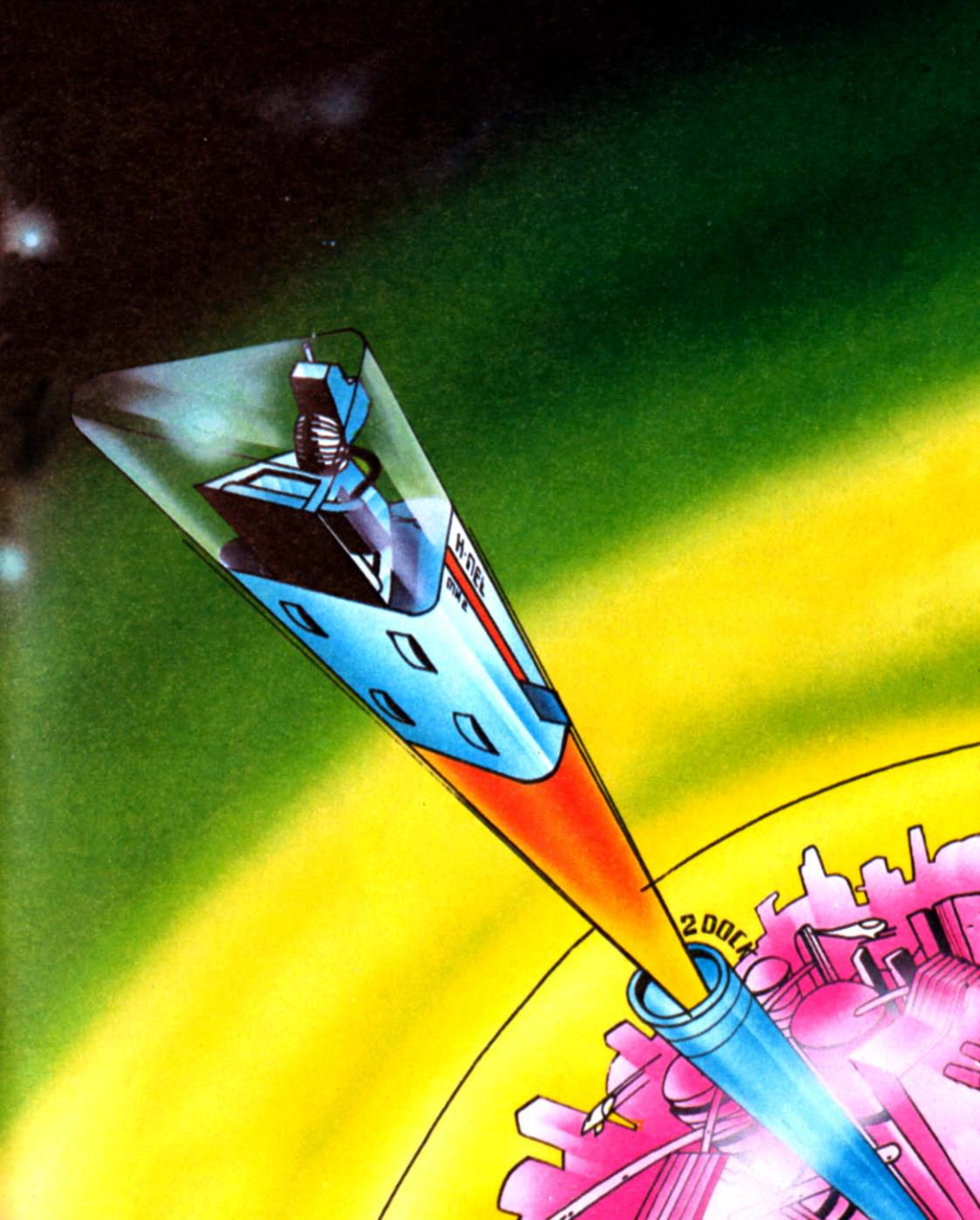


K9 was glad to escape the smog-ridden, over-crowded, high-speed world of Tellus. He could remember when it had been called Earth, and was a green and pleasant place.

That was before the human race had swarmed like locusts across the galaxy.

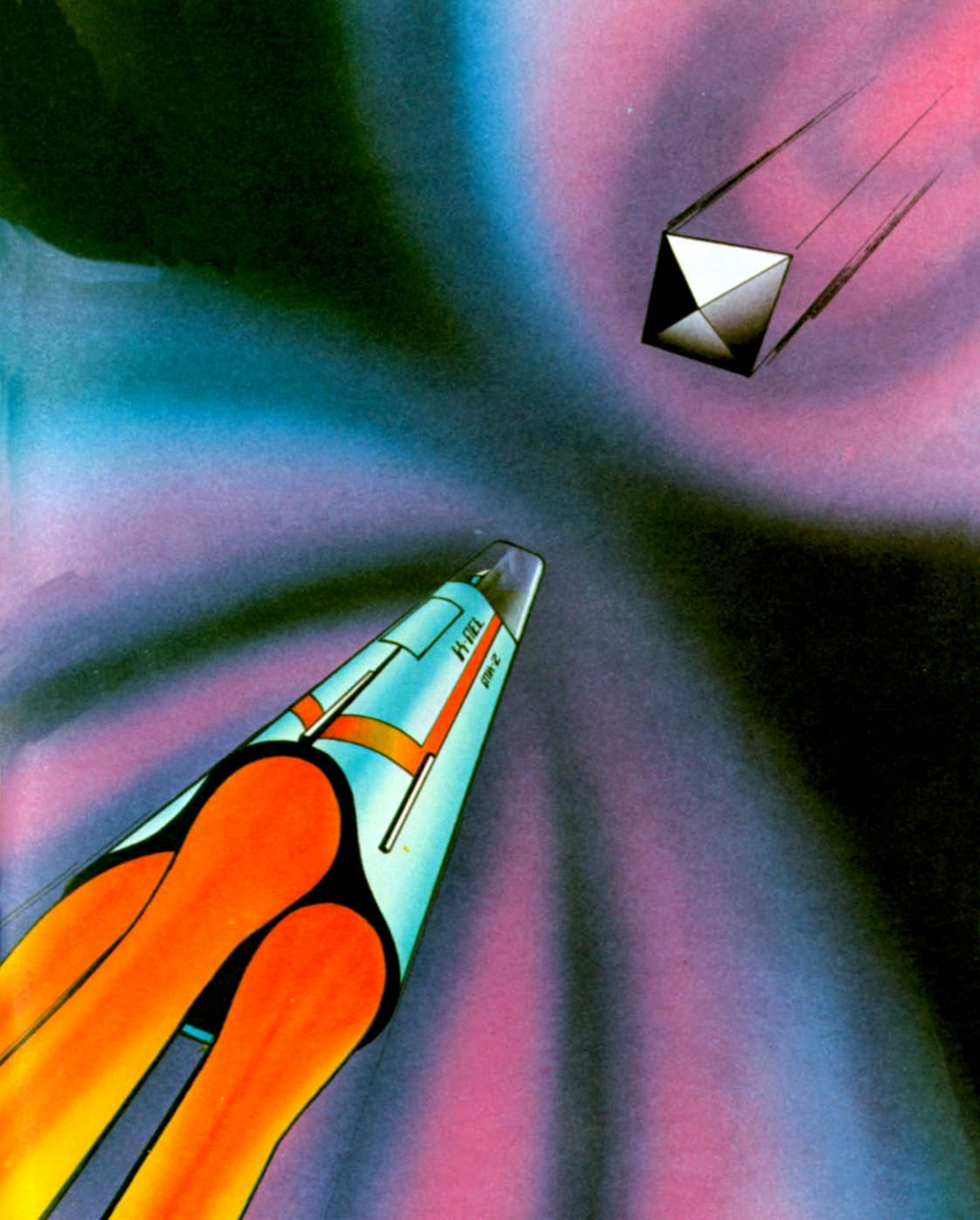
Now Tellus, as it was called, was the weapons-systems centre of the universe. The whole planet had become one vast armaments factory, owned and run by Tellac Inc.

But the president was right. A missing planet was a danger to navigation.


H-DEL
2 DOCK

K9 set to work re-charting the area so that Tellac tankers could pass safely through it. He did not hold out much hope of finding the missing planet. Planets, after being mined and bored by Tellac Inc. until their usefulness was over, often either collapsed like eggshells or exploded like balloons.

K9 was so busy with his astro-maps he failed to detect the time-warp bending through space towards him, its waves radiating from a black pyramid at its centre.

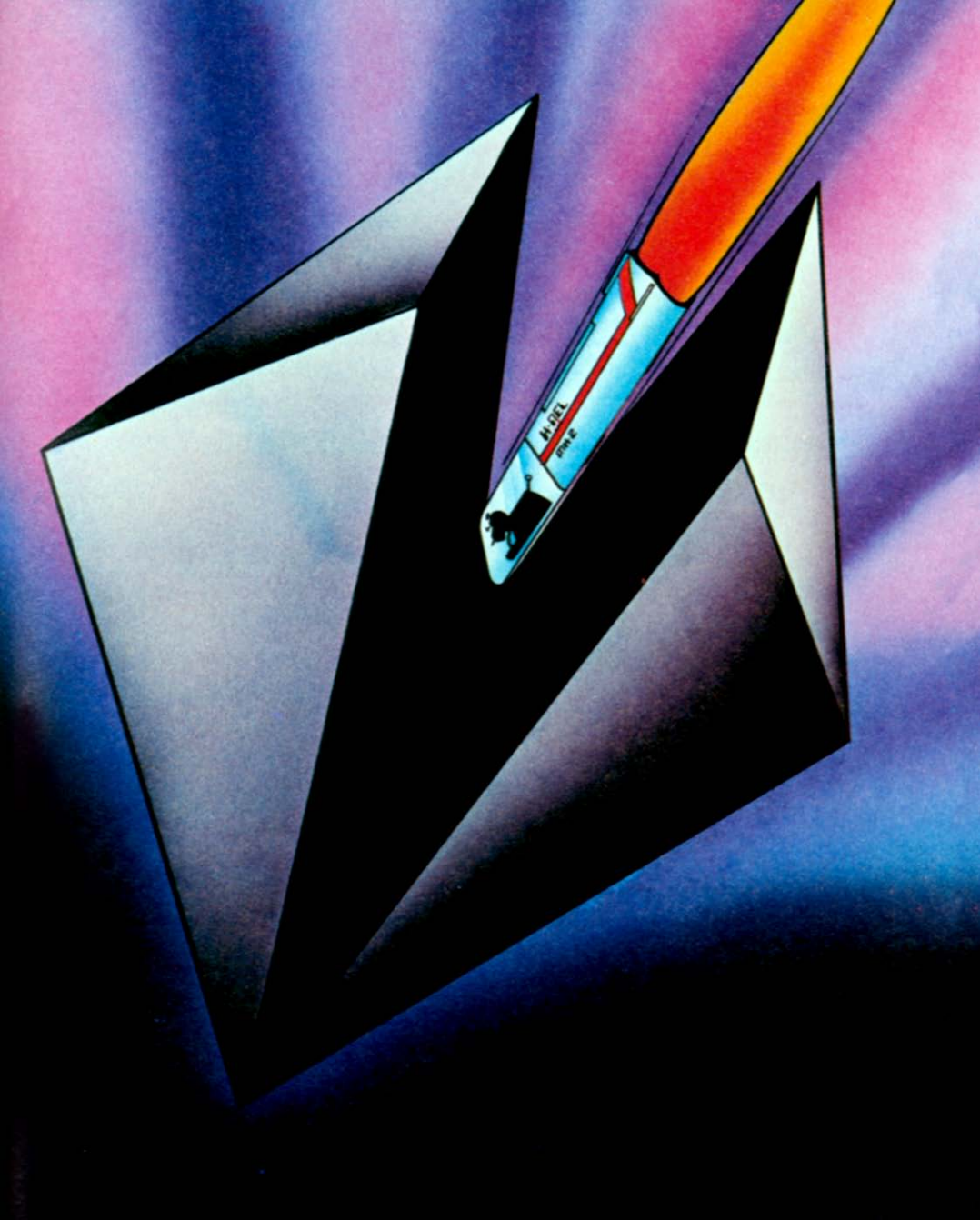

HI-TEC

K9 shut down all sensors and waited for the crash. It was his own fault, he knew, for not keeping a full 360-degree watch.

But no crash came.

Immediately K9 re-alerted his sensor systems. The information amazed him. He analysed it, and re-analysed it, but there was no possible doubt. He had passed through a star lock — one of the barriers that kept space-time zones apart.

He knew he must be in a different universe — but which one?



K9 emerged from the star lock to find his small craft plunging through fathomless depths. The speed of K-NEL's passage turned the water to steam around the narrow hull. Shadowy reptilian shapes swam through the murk around him. He corrected course, slowed down, and headed for the surface.

A faint blur of land showed on the horizon. When K9 reached it he found himself beside a flat, swampy plain. On it, hundreds of dinosaurs were peacefully grazing.

The channels of the vast swampland contained herds of diplodocus. On the banks, dimetrodons and horned ankylosaurs ate and slumbered. Occasionally a tyrannosaur lifted itself up and ran after the shadow of K-NEL.

The sky was strung with skeins of lumbering pterodactyls, and here and there pairs of archeopteryx hovered and swooped . . .

In all, K9 catalogued hundreds of species — species that should have evolved millions of years apart — all living together on the immense green plain.

The plain became a forest — a cavernous, dripping forest of fern-trees hundreds of feet high. The blue-green gloom was splashed with brilliant colour here and there — enormous butterflies and moths, dragonflies with wings ten feet across. In the undergrowth beetles crashed like horses, and spiders as big as gorillas swung from webs between the trees . . .

K-NEL
MK-2

The landscape changed again, became drier. Herds of pygmy hippos appeared, and bison in their thousands, then rhinos, and tapirs. On a snowy mountain slope a sabre-tooth tiger held a mammoth at bay.

K9 realised he had flown over five hundred million years of evolution in less than an hour.

Then, dead ahead, a transparent dome appeared.

Civilisation, thought K9.

A slot in the dome opened. He flew in.

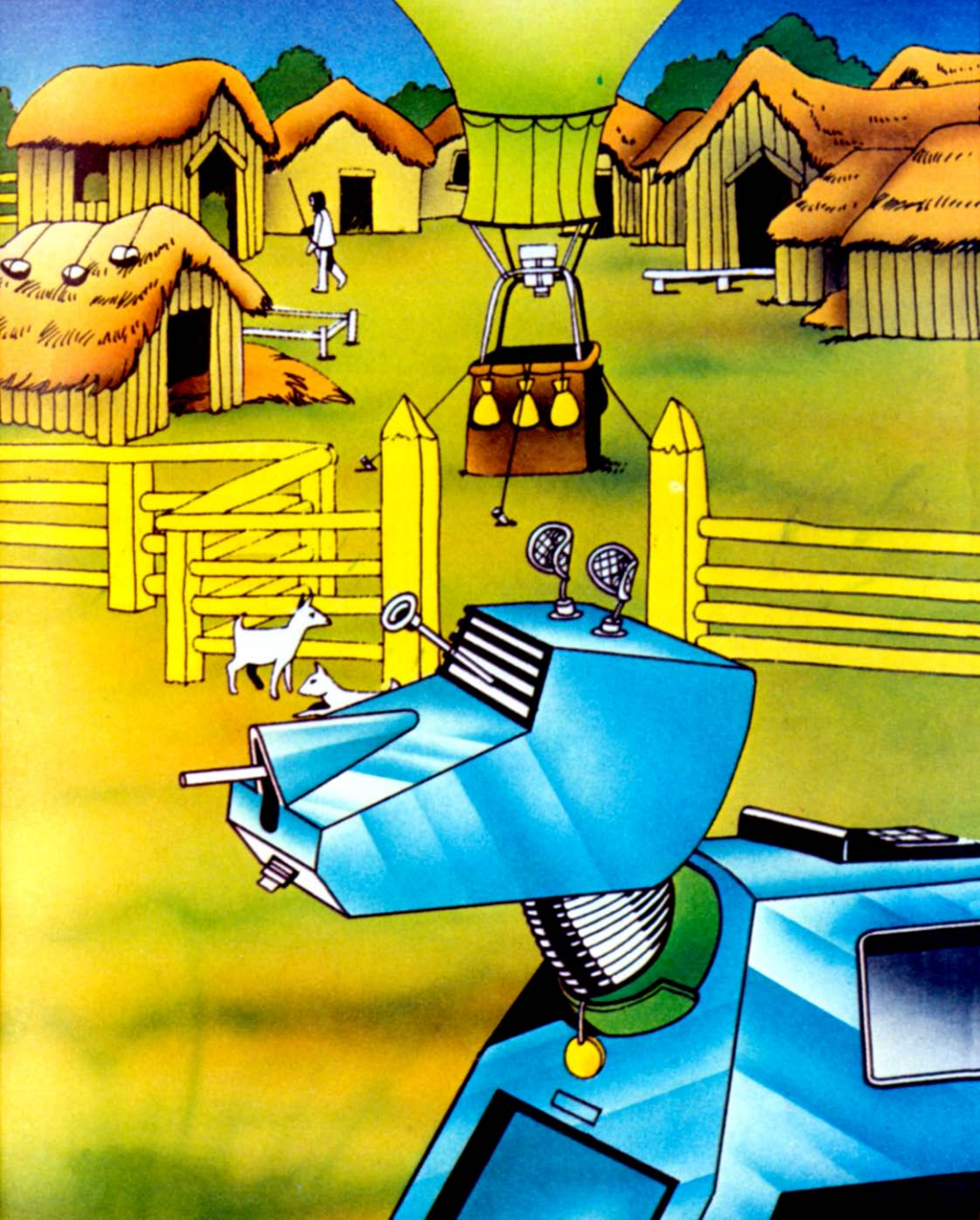
The wooden huts were roofed with palm leaves, and surrounded by vegetable plantations. At one end of the compound lay the only 'modern' object: a hot-air observation balloon.

K9 had found the missing miners.

'You must help us,' said Votri, the bearded leader of the miners and their families.

'Negative,' replied K9. 'My craft is too small to help you all escape.'

Votri smiled. 'We do not want to escape. We want you to help us remain here, undiscovered.'



'Come,' said Votri to the puzzled K9. 'Let me show you something.'

They drifted north over massed herds of antelope, zebra, giraffe and buffalo. Sometimes they saw prides of lions asleep in the shade of acacia trees, females below, the male slung in the branches above.

And once, a group of small brown-skinned two-legged creatures scuttled into the bush as they passed overhead.

'Men?' asked K9.

Votri shook his head and smiled. 'Not yet.'

A thermal of warm air swept them up over a low mountain range. On the other side, as far as the eye could see, lay mile after mile of bare, scarred rock, its surface cratered like the moon. Nothing grew, nothing moved. The land was dead, sterile.

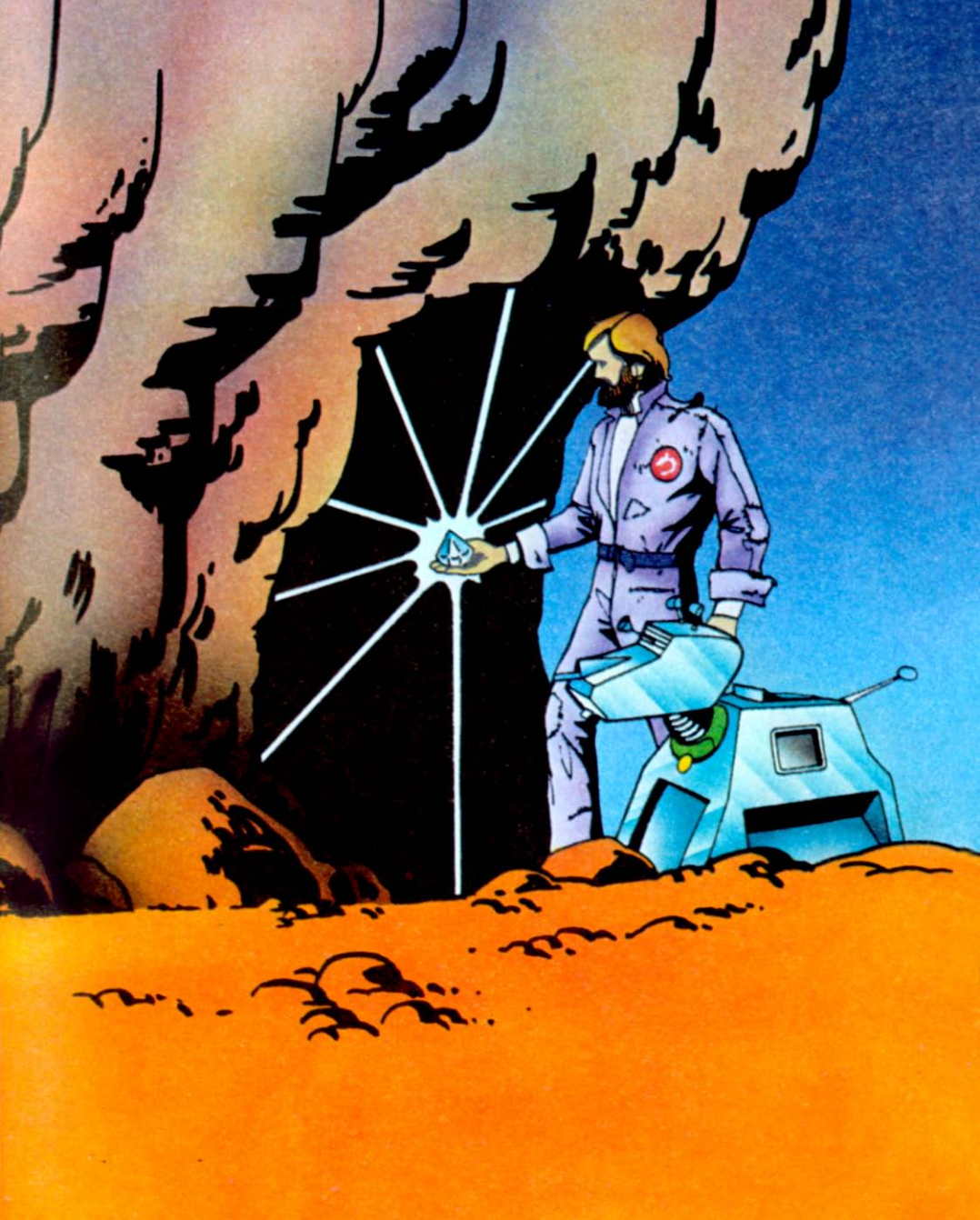
Votri's face became sombre. 'This is where we used to mine,' he said. 'Ten years of our lives were wasted here.'

He led K9 to a mineshaft.

'Until we discovered this.'

In Votri's hand lay a chunk of clear bluish crystal, glowing from within with a liquid, shifting light.

'We call it Star Crystal,' he said. 'There are tons of it here. With it anyone can unlock the barriers between this and every other universe. You can imagine how Tellac Inc. would use it. To plunder the whole of space and time, and fill it with a race of beings who knew nothing but greed.'



In the dusk as they returned, K9 could see the small camp fires of the 'pre-men', as Votri called them.

'What will you use Star Crystal for?' asked K9.

'To protect ourselves against intruders. And to protect the 'pre-men' against us,' answered Votri. 'You have seen this world. How it contains all forms of life, from the earliest creatures to the first men. Perhaps a new race of men will arise. Perhaps something else.'

'They have already discovered fire,' said K9.

K9 left the green planet with Votri's last words imprinted on his memory banks.

'Help us give life another chance. We are here only as observers. When we are gone, none will come after. You are our only record, our only link with your universe. But tell no one, we beg you, not even your masters, the Time Lords. Give life another chance.'

In his report K9 said that the planet had disappeared 'from the universe as we know it'.

K9 kept his promise, and his secret.

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